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The History of Greenville
The Great Fire At Fredericksburg
(An Historical Poem)
An Old-Time Religious Service
In Bethel Township

Read Before the
Lebanon County Historical Society
April 27, 1917

By E. GRUMBINE, M.D.,
MT. ZION, PA.

VOL. VII

No. 7

FOREWORD

WHAT I shall read to you this afternoon is historical in its way, but I shall say nothing of wars and revolutions, nothing of captains and generals, or others connected with the science of killing men, nothing of the assassins of the sea, or of any royal acts of frightfulness and murder. I shall tell you of the origin and growth of a little hamlet in Bethel township, of a painful incident of Fredericksburg, my native village, and I shall depict to you an oldtime scene of peace, serenity and neighborly love.

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GREENVILLE

WHEN D. G. BUSH in 1853 published his key to Pelton's Outline Map of Pennsylvania, and named in rhyme, adapted to the tune of Yankee Doodle, the "Rivers and Creeks of the Keystone State," saying that the tune

"Is an air that will apply
To rivers, creeks and fountains,
As well as to the warrior's march
O'er valleys, plains and mountains,"

he either entirely forgot, or deliberately ignored the fair Swatara. This omission has been corrected and the following stanzas have been supplied:

A certain stream adorns the earth,
It is the fair Swatara,
Named for the hungry Indian's shaft,
The deadly aimed "sweet arrow."

Divided into branches two,
And called "The Big" and "Little";—
Of old the haunts of fish and duck,
Which formed the Red Man's victuals.

At another time and place the same writer apostrophizes the stream in the following lines:—

SWATARÁ! Whose name we find in Whittier's song,
Whose shady shores I've often roamed along,
Those shores which felt a Conrad Weiser's tread,
That stream, up which our German fathers sped,
When, having slipt a ruthless tyrant's chains,
They southward fled from fair Schoharie's plains
To seek safe homes 'mong Tulpehocken's glades,
And build their altars in Penn's sylvan shades.

On the banks of this romantic stream in Bethel township, settled, in early times, people by the name of Gible, Mast, Groff, Moyer, Noll, Werner, Stein, and Albert. One of these

erected a gristmill a few rods east of the present bridge spanning the stream at Greenville. His name was Albert, and he afterwards built another and larger mill some hundreds of yards further up the creek. Traces of the first mill-race are still to be seen. Albert's expenses were very great, and the enterprise threatened him with financial ruin, when a neighbor, John Noll, came to his aid and helped him out of his difficulties.

In the year 1844, when the mill was running day and night at times, a certain miller, after filling the hoppers with grain, lay down and fell asleep. Before he awoke the hoppers had become empty, and the flinty burr-stones striking fire, ignited the woodwork and the mill was burned down. It was rebuilt by John Albert, a grandson of the projector of the first mill, and also a grandson of the John Noll, who had helped the former Albert out of his financial straits which were brought on by his early enterprise.

In connection with the gristmill was a sawmill, where years ago many hundred thousand feet of timber were converted into lumber of various kinds.

The place bore the name of Albert's mills, but when a village was built around it, it was named Greenville, from the thousands of green pine and hemlock trees which skirted the banks of the Swatara.

In the early years of the War of the rebellion, a post office was established. It received the name of Greble, probably because Greble has a sound similar to Greenville, and another office in the State already bore the name of the village. The name Greble was chosen to honor also the unfortunate officer of that name, who was killed in the terrible blunder made at Big Bethel in 1861, where two detachments of Union soldiers fired into each other, each mistaking the other for a party of rebels.

The first postmaster was Jeremiah White, and Elias Bressler carried the mail, weekly, on foot, by way of Mount Zion to and from Lebanon. Since the establishment of the rural delivery scheme, many small post offices have been wiped out,

Greble among them, and the village has, by popular usage, received back its original name of Greenville. The place and vicinity now get their mail from Myerstown by free rural delivery.

The first schoolhouse was built in 1842 by seven leading men of the time, viz., George Gible, Sr., Henry Brown, Jonathan Groff, Abraham Meyer, John Seltzer, Abraham Mast, and John Albert. Each of these contributed \$7.00, while smaller contributions were received from others. There was no contract and no graft, the parents of the neighborhood performing the manual work and making it a labor of love. The first schoolmaster was Andreas Kurr, of Bethel, Berks county, who later returned to his native place where he served for many years as Justice of the Peace.

After William Stein, Jeremiah White kept the general store. His successors were Levi Gring and Aaron Spitler. Gring was the son of a Reformed minister of Fredericksburg.

A licensed tavern was kept in connection with the store, but Mr. Spitler learned that what money he gained in the liquor business he lost in bad debts in the store, and some time in the seventies he stopped the sale of liquor and converted the bar-room into a parlor. Greenville has been the better for it both morally and financially since.

Dr. David Albert, a son of John Albert, the miller, was the first medical man to practice his profession in Greenville. He was handsome, possessed the qualities necessary to success and gained quite a practice in the short time of his professional career; but he contracted typhoid fever from a patient and died at an early age.

He was succeeded by Dr. Mengle, who also remained but a few years. He happened to get into difficulties with the proprietor of the hotel, Mr. Levi Gring, regarding some irregularities in obtaining provender for his horse, and he left under a cloud, in 1868, for parts unknown to the compiler of this history.

A few years after Mengle's departure, Dr. Valentine J. Albert, a second son of John Albert, opened an office in a

small building, next east of the post office, and practiced several years, when he moved to Schuylkill county.

The last medical man to practice the healing art in the village, was Dr. Levi Batdorf. He had lived for many years at Mt. Etna, and was well advanced in life when he came to his new and last field of labor in 1897. He remained until his death in 1901, and the village has been without a resident physician since.

The first free-school house under the common school laws was built at the extreme west end, some rods west of the bridge, on the south side of the highway. It was quite small, and towards the close of the century it was torn down, and the school for one season was crowded into a cooper shop, still smaller. The following year a new and more commodious structure was erected half a dozen rods to the southwest of the old one. The building contractor was William Brown, and the cost was less than \$1,000. Both the common school houses were of brick. In the first one a Sunday-school was kept one summer and a picnic was held, but with the advent of cold weather it was discontinued. The officers were Wilson F. Hower, Dr. Valentine J. Albert, and Aaron Spitler, and the year was 1878.

The Greenville voter used to make two pilgrimages yearly to Fredericksburg to exercise his right of suffrage, but in 1888 the township was divided into two election districts, and now he votes at Mount Zion.

Some time in the sixties a young German, named Christian Treida, came to ply his trade as a blacksmith. Jacob Albert kindly assisted him pecuniarily in getting a shop, and in obtaining an anvil, bellows and tools. He was obliging and industrious, and stuck diligently to his trade. The sound of his anvil rang along the waters of the Swatara early in the morning, and the fires of his forge gleamed late in the darkening hours of the evening. He exemplified the old saying, that "industry and frugality lead to wealth." After working thirty odd years in his shop, which was located just west of the southern end of the bridge, he had acquired two large

farms, to one of which he retired to enjoy the evening of his life on his own farm.

Other blacksmiths succeeding Mr. Treida, were Peter Achenbach, Jared Umbahen, Nathaniel Achenbach and Jacob Fink.

One of the leading men of later times was Isaac Garman, a miller and a wheelwright by trade. He was careful and shrewd in business, and accumulated considerable money. But like Samuel J. Tilden and Attorney General Brewster, he made a will, which, when probated, was found wanting. It was contested and a considerable portion of his worldly wealth was squandered in the law courts and failed to reach the rightful heirs after his death.

A certain well-known character was an eccentric cobbler by the name of William Lutz. He was a club-footed cripple who never wore shoes, going bare-footed in the summer and wearing cloths wrapped around his feet in winter. He lived with his widowed mother in a brown one-story house close to the bridge on the high bank of the creek. The building has been removed and the site is occupied by a barn. He wore his black hair long to his shoulders, and this with his dark, piercing eyes, scowling brow, short body and shuffling gait, gave him an uncouth appearance. He had a violent temper, and became the butt for the jibes of the boys, who often teased him into a fit of his besetting passion. He received the nickname of "Billy Lightcap," and when a party of young men in passing his house on a dark night, threw stones on his roof and called out "Billy Lightcap," he would rush to the door and hurl the direst curses and fiercest maledictions after his persecutors. Several times he fired a shotgun after them but without harm to anyone. In his later years, after the village tavern had gone out of existence, he kept soft drinks and candy for sale. Birch beer he called "putch," and it was said that if one knew how to give the correct "wink" it was not a difficult matter to get a glass of lager from him if one had no scruples to drinking out of his disgustingly dirty glasses. He died in 1894.

Two of the most prominent men of the place were the

Albert brothers, John and Jacob. The former was the owner and proprietor of the gristmill, and the latter was the possessor of a splendid farm of 200 acres, and he retired after middle life to a fine house in the village. Both met with unfortunate business reverses later, and died in reduced circumstances, each at an advanced age. They lie buried at Klopp's church.

Another man of prominence was Solomon Hower. He was tall and strong and well-proportioned. He was a farmer, brick manufacturer, mail carrier, and he in his time filled a number of township offices. He built one of the best dwelling houses in the village to which he retired from active life, and in which he died in February, 1891. One of his sons became a teacher and taught in different districts of the county, and has also filled a number of political offices.

THE GREAT FIRE IN FRED- ERICKSBURG

IN 1827

We have a friend, known as a friend in deed,
The warmest friend that aids us in our need;
This friend gives comfort on the coldest night,
In blackest darkness gives us cheer and light.

Not faithful *friend* alone, but servant too,
That aye will cook our food, will boil and stew;
Will melt and smelt the metals of our earth,
And change base ore to things of priceless worth.

A friend in need, a friend indeed, so long
As we our care and watchfulness prolong;
But lacks our vigilance, a cruel foe,
That works destruction, wretchedness and woe.

Ah! then it changes to a cruel master
And brings calamity and dire disaster.
And thus it was in Eighteen-twenty-seven,
When flame and smoke in Stumpstown rose to'd heaven!

The town was small, its buildings were of wood,
And none of brick or stone, save one, which stood
Across the street from Rudy's public house,
The site at present of the tavern Strauss.

The rest were built of logs in simple style,
Some roofed with straw and some with earthen tile,
Old Frederick Stump had set the building pace,
Himself had built of logs, and named the place.

And Stumpstown was the name the village bore
For many years in early times of yore;
But now 'tis known as Fredericksburg, a town
Which gives its founder fame and great renown.

Tradition says that on a certain day
In summer-time, mayhap in balmy May,
A gun's report fell on the startled air,
Quite near the western bound of Market Square.

Some crows, it seems, had settled in a batch
Upon a stable roof, a roof of thatch.
The birds were seen, their cawing also heard
By one whose youthful sporting blood was stirred.

His gun with load of powder, shot and tow,
Was aimed full soon at th' evil-omened crow!
If any bird received that fateful shot
And met its death, tradition sayeth not.

But this is told, the thatch was set on fire
And caused for Fredericksburg-disaster dire.
A flock of geese, we're told, once saved a city,—
But crows caused Stumpstown's *fall*, and more's the pity!

The quiet village lay in calm repose
When on the sleepy, silent air there rose
The dreadful cry of "Fire! Fire" which struck the ear,
And filled each heart with paralyzing fear.

A skeptic few first deemed it but a joke,
But when they saw the clouds of gruesome smoke
They, too, took up the echo of the cry,
And fear and terror looked from every eye.

The people, old and young, were sore distressed
In noting that the wind came from the west,
And that it carried spark and smoke and flame,—
They saw that in their path destruction came.

And so for want of water, want of means,
And lack of every sort of fire machines,
Were burnt a score of homes with household treasure,
And losses were beyond compute or measure.

The frightened townsfolk ran and scurried thither,
The children and the women hurried hither;
The panic seized on mother and on daughter—
Each wished the fire to check: there was no water!

And so the roaring flames went on and on,—
Alas! and must the village be undone?
Must house and home and workshop be consumed?
And was the town of Frederick Stump thus doomed?

The schoolhouse on the eastern village bound
Was ~~fast~~ to fall in flames unto the ground;
No human lives were lost, the Lord be praised!
All other losses could be met and faced.

As fabled Phenix from its ashes rose,
We see with wonder how the village grows
Again, and how a fairer Stumpstown takes
Its place, and unto nobler efforts wakes.

This day you may o'er many countries roam,
But nowhere will you find the ideal home
Where quiet and the simple life prevail
As here and o'er the neighb'ring hill and dale.

Fair Fredericksburg's as peaceful as when first
In early times by Frederick Stump 'twas nursed;
A quiet haven for the world-sick soul
As may be found when sought from pole to pole.

AN OLD TIME RELIGIOUS MEETING

It is a delightful morning in the middle of June, 1854, more than 60 years ago. The place is a farm in Bethel township, county of Lebanon. The gently stirring air is as full of fragrance as the balmy breezes in the Vale of Cashmere, described by the poet Moore in Lallah Rookh, and the grass fields are reddening with myriad thousands of clover blossoms, while buttercups, forget-me-nots and anemones dot the fair meadow in exquisite profusion.

The scene is the summer kitchen, or "spring-house" of "John Light, tanner," a one-story log structure, twenty-four feet square, which for the day has been converted into a religious sanctuary. In it have met twenty to forty men and women and also half a dozen half-grown boys. The latter have chosen seats near the open window overlooking a little purling brook in whose clear pools they can watch the schools of little minnows disport themselves in the limpid fluid.

Beyond the brook, in the meadow along the side of the road, stand half a dozen straight and tall Lombardy poplars, amid whose branches the red-winged blackbird and his mate utter their musical notes, and above the tall primeval oaks of the grove towards the south, circle a score of cawing crows.

Farther towards the west is seen the three-storied school-house with its squatty cupola, and near it the spire of old St. John's Church is silhouetted against the summer sky. Both of these structures are no more. Some of the dwelling houses and stables of Fredericksburg are also visible to the roaming eyes of the boys, who came to this meeting not at all from choice or free will of their own.

The congregation are seated on clean benches of unpainted pine without backs,—the men on one side of the room, and the women on the other. The women wear home-made gingham bonnets of the plainest pattern, and there is not a single "picture hat" and not one feather or silken bow to be seen.

On one side of the room is a large open fireplace, in which hang large iron kettles concealed by a calico curtain drawn across the opening. The place is lighted by two windows and the open door. In one corner of the room between the two windows, is a small cherrywood table on which rest a small Bible and a hymnbook, both German.

Behind the table, seated on common wooden chairs, are the exhorter, or preacher, and one of the leaders in the congregation.

In the barnyard upon the hill toward the east stand, tied to rails and fence posts, five or six saddled horses and as many more attached to carriages, or rockaways. Others of the congregation are still coming, most of them on foot, from the neighboring farms and from the village of Fredericksburg.

The hour for opening is almost here and the last comer has found a seat on a bench. For a few minutes the place is very quiet and naught disturbs the stillness save a little nervous coughing and some deepdrawn sighs, when one of the sisters in a clear, strong voice starts to sing:

"Sish Freida, Freida
Auf dem Weg des Lebens;
Sish Freida, Freida
Zu Loben Gottes Sohn."

This refrain with two lines out of a well-known hymn following it, is sung three or four times, when the "Fermauner" or preacher calls out "*Lusset uns bacte!*" (Let us pray.) There is a shuffling of feet and a rustling of starched calico and gingham, and all are down on their knees. One of the brethren in a subdued voice begins to pray. He is encouraged by some of the others who utter loud "amens" when he gradually raises his voice and becomes more emphatic. The "Amens" are now accompanied or interspersed by other exclamations, such as "*Gott helf!*" "*Gelobet sei der Herr!*" "*Gott sei Dank!*" "*Lob Gott!*" until half the congregation are shouting responses, while the petitioner's voice rises to its highest pitch. The prayer-meeting is now "on" as may be heard across a twenty-acre field.

The brother's breath and vocabulary both become exhausted and he arrives at his final "Amen" when all rise again to their seats. The preacher now reads a hymn as follows:

"O, Mensch wie ist dein Hertz bestellt?
Hab achtung auf dein Leben;
Was tragt fur Frucht dein Herzensfeldt
Sin 's Dornen oder Reben?
Den an der Frucht kennt Man die Saht,
Auch wer des Feldt besehet hat,
Gott oder der Ferderber."

He lines the hymn and the congregation sing standing up, after which, with a few preliminary nervous coughs, he reads a chapter from the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. This he explains in a brief sermonette according to his lights, in the German vernacular, with here and there a word of High German thrown in by way of embellishment. He is not much of an orator, but he believes, and his hearers believe, that Divine inspiration directly from on high, shapes his sentences and fashions his speech. It may be probable that he studied the selected chapter the night before with the aid of a learned commentary, by the light of a fat-lamp, at his home on the farm. His sermon, or exhortation (*Fermaunung*) has the quality mentioned by Shakespeare as the "soul of wit." It is very short as to clock-time, but to the boys near the window, it is painfully long, as their legs dangle restlessly from the bench which is uncomfortably high for them. They are glad to glide down from their perch and kneel on the floor for a change, as the exhorter exclaims, "*Lusst uns nochamul baeta!*"

Listen! this time it is a sister who begins in a voice feminine and weak, but which anon grows stronger and louder as she awkwardly formulates her petition to the throne of grace. She, also, is encouraged by many "amens" and other responses from both brethren and sisters. It is extremely disturbing and pathetic to listen to her pleading, and one of the half-grown boys hastily brushes away the rolling tears, and wishes she would come to a full stop. This she presently does and

the congregation rise. Before all are seated a strong voice begins another song or chant, with the refrain:

"Nur geglaubt und du wirsht erloest,
Nur geglaubt und du wirsht erloest,
Nur geglaubt und du wirsht erloest,
Und der Himmel ist dein auf ewig!"

Everyone sings, and even the boys join in the chorus quite vociferously.

Among the gathering are two emotional characters whose voices when praying are exceptionally loud and strong. They together shout louder than all the rest of the congregation can in chorus. The one is my grandfather, "John Light, tanner," and the other is John Buchmoyer, a shoemaker of town, whose avoirdupois reaches 250 pounds, and his stentorian lungs are fashioned in proportion to his weight. My grandfather is extremely enthusiastic when aroused, and he pitches his voice in accordance with his emotions. When he and the stout shoemaker get up into the high keys in prayer together, the noise fairly makes the windows rattle and is loud enough to split the shingles on the roof of the low building! The delicate nerves of the boys are thrilled to a painful degree, and their hearts are wrung with indefinable terror, and fears of an angry God and of a seething hell as the doom of the unrepentant sinner.

Two or three more prayers, two or three more hymns and refrains, a few additional words by the exhorter, and the services are over.

The scene is still vivid enough in the writer's memory to name nearly all the members of that assembly. They were Jacob Buchmoyer and his wife, Rudy Sherk, Josiah S. Light and his wife, John Buchmoyer, John Weller and his wife, Tobias Behny, Henry and Abraham Wenger and their wives, who were daughters of John Light, Jacob L. Bicksler, Jacob Weller and his wife, Samuel Sherk and his wife, Mrs. Maria Grumbine, John Oberholtzer and his wife, Jacob Lentz and his wife, and others.

The preacher, whose name is Moyer, and who has come from North Annville township, remains for dinner, as do also five or six near relatives of the Light family. Mrs. Light is a fine cook and the dinner is an excellent one, the pies and cakes being especially good.

The carriages and saddle horses bear their riders in different directions, and every one present that day is *better in heart* and more *charitable* in spirit, for having spent the morning hour in religious communion with prayer, and chant and song.

How simple were the little hymns sung there! How fervid were their unpretentious Pennsylvania German prayers! How full of music were their quaint choruses and rhythmic chants!

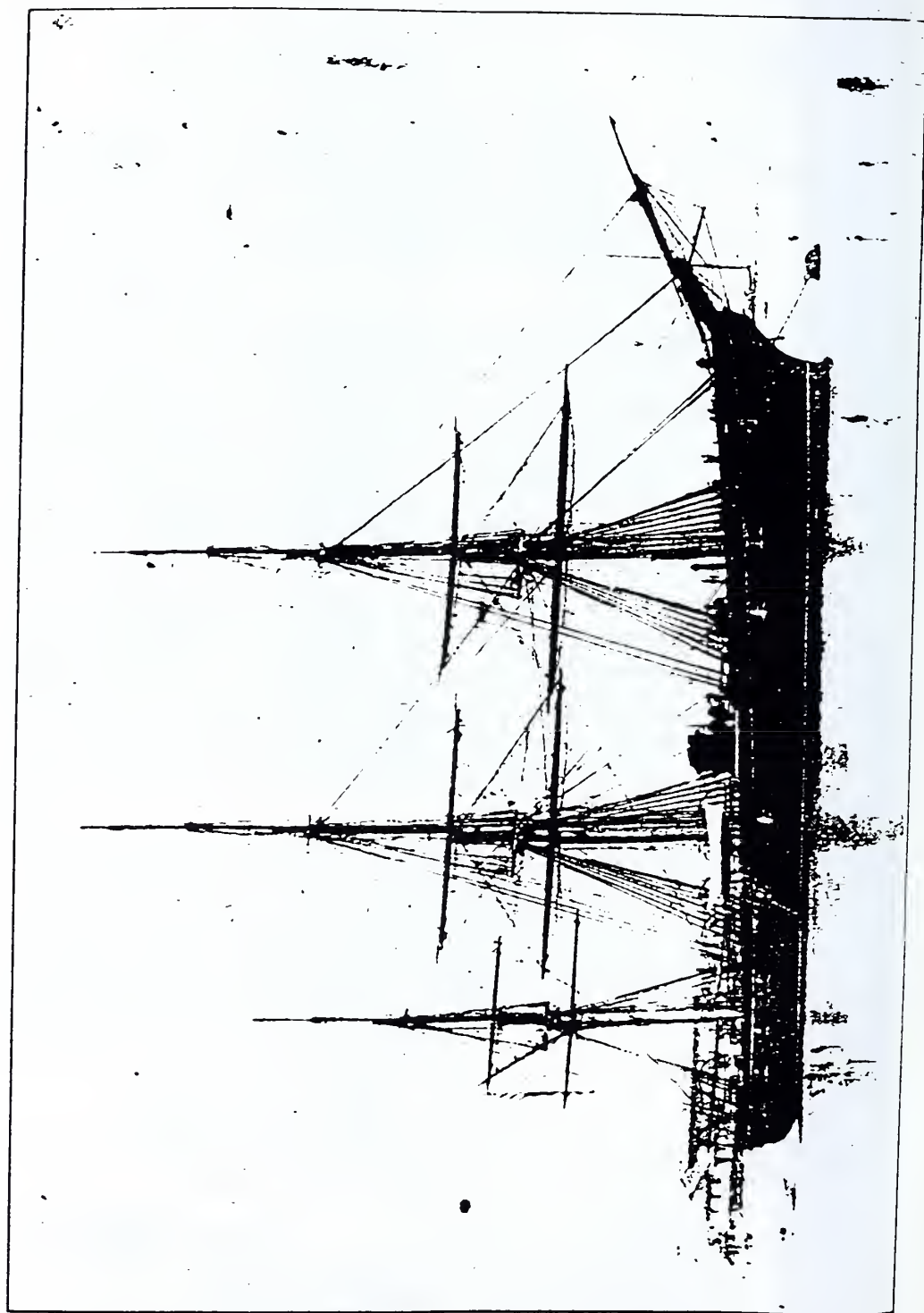
No loud-clanging bell called them together; no deep-toned organ accompanied their hearty voices in song; no learned, college-bred priest explained to them the difference between ecclesiastical tweedledee and tweedledum, and yet they carried home with them in their simple hearts much peace and charity on that beautiful Sabbath forenoon three score years ago.

Since that lovely June day, all of them, save three or four of the younger boys and girls then present, have gone to join the great majority in the unknown and mysterious beyond. They have gone to that bourne whence none return, to that land of which they often sang the refrain in the ungrammatical vernacular of rural Lebanon county:

"Weid ivver dem Yordon
Shau das Landt, schau das Landt!
Weid ivver dem Yordon
Schau das Verheis'ne Landt!"

The English of which is

Far over Jordan
See the land, see the land!
Far over Jordan
Behold the promised land!



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